

A Holy and Royal Priesthood

In verse 5 Peter speaks of both a spiritual house and a holy priesthood. “Spiritual” denotes the qualification of the divine life that lives and grows; “holy,” the qualification of the divine nature that separates and sanctifies. The house of God subsists mainly by the divine life; hence, it is spiritual. The priesthood subsists mainly by the divine nature; hence, it is holy.

The holy priesthood is the spiritual house. In the New Testament two Greek words are used for priesthood, both of which are translated priesthood. *Hierosune*, as in Hebrews 7:12, refers to the priestly office, and *hierateuma*, as in 1 Peter 2:5, 9, refers to the assembly of priests, a body of priests. The coordinated body of priests is the built-up spiritual house. Although Peter did not address his two Epistles to the church, nor did he use the term church in stressing the corporate life of the believers in this verse, he does use the terms spiritual house and holy priesthood to indicate the church life. It is not the spiritual life in an individualistic way, but that in a corporate way that can fulfill God’s purpose and satisfy His desire. He wants a spiritual house for His dwelling, a priestly body for His service. Peter’s view concerning the believers’ corporate service in coordination is the same as Paul’s in Romans 12. This service issues from three vital steps in the spiritual life: new birth (1 Pet. 1:2), growth in life by being nourished with Christ, and building up with the believers.

SPIRITUAL SACRIFICES

The spiritual house and the holy priesthood are synonymous terms. The spiritual house is for God’s dwelling, and the holy priesthood is for God’s service. According to 2:5, the building up of a spiritual house into a holy priesthood is for a particular function. This function is “to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” Here we see that Jesus Christ is the channel through which the spiritual sacrifices are offered to God. Christ channels our offerings to God, and these offerings are the sacrifices presented to Him. Furthermore, what is offered to God must be something of Christ.

The spiritual sacrifices which the believers offer in the New Testament age according to God’s economy are Christ in all the varied aspects of His riches as the reality of all the sacrifices of the Old Testament types, such as the burnt offering, meal offering, peace offering, sin offering, and trespass offering (Lev. 1—5). Also these spiritual sacrifices include our praises and the things we do for God (Heb. 13:15-16; Phil. 4:18).

A CHOSEN RACE, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR A POSSESSION

In 2:9 Peter goes on to say, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for a possession, so that you may tell out the virtues of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” Race, priesthood, nation, and people are all collective nouns, referring to the believers corporately. As a race, the believers have been chosen; as a priesthood, a body of priests, we are royal, kingly; as a nation, we are holy; as a people, we are God’s possession, a possession particularly acquired and owned by God as His treasure. The chosen race denotes our lineage from God; the royal priesthood, our service to God; the holy nation, our community for God; and the people for a possession, our preciousness to God. This is all in the corporate sense. Hence, we need to be built together.

The words “chosen race” indicate our source. As a chosen race, we have our source in God. We are also a royal priesthood. “Royal” denotes the status of our priesthood, which is kingly, like that of Christ the King, our High Priest, typified by Melchisedec (Heb. 7:1-2, 25; Gen. 14:18). We are also a holy nation and a people for a possession. “Holy” denotes the nature of the nation. The Greek words rendered “a people for a possession” are an equivalent to a Hebrew expression. This is a reference to the Old Testament, and the Hebrew expression implies a particular treasure. We are God’s particular treasure, His special and precious possession. In Titus 2:14 Paul speaks of “a people for His own possession.” This also may be rendered “peculiar people.” This is an

expression borrowed from the Old Testament (Deut. 7:6; 14:2; 26:18), and it denotes a people privately possessed by God as His peculiar treasure (Exo. 19:5), His own possession. First we are a chosen race, then a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a people for a possession. As God's particular treasure, we are His people who are precious to Him.

TELLING OUT GOD'S VIRTUES

We are such a race, priesthood, nation, and people so that we may tell out the virtues of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. The Greek word rendered "tell out" also means proclaim abroad. First we must be born anew and grow in life, and then be built up and serve corporately. Now we need to proclaim abroad, to tell out. To serve corporately is to satisfy God by offering up Christ as spiritual sacrifices; to proclaim abroad is to benefit others by showing forth the virtues of the One who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

The virtues in verse 9 are excellencies, excellent and glorious virtues (2 Pet. 1:3). These refer to what God is and has, and the marvelous light of God consummates in His glory. To and by His virtue and glory God has called us.

The virtues here are excellent attributes, acts, and behavior. God has many virtues. For example, He is merciful. To be merciful is a virtue. God is also loving. He even loves sinners. This love is another of God's virtues. All the excellent divine attributes are the virtues of God. We need to tell out, to proclaim abroad, these excellent virtues.

In his writings Peter emphasizes the matter of virtue more than Paul does. Peter says in 2 Peter 1:3 that we have been called by the virtue and the glory of God. He says not only that we have been called to God's glory and virtue; he says that we have been called by His glory and virtue.

When the Lord Jesus was on earth, Peter and the other disciples saw His virtues. At least once, on the mount of transfiguration, they saw the Lord's glory. Seeing Christ's virtues was a daily occurrence. Whatever the Lord did was an excellent act full of virtue. Christ's excellencies are great in number. Every day the Lord Jesus manifested His virtues, and Peter saw this. Later, Peter wrote that we have been called by the Lord's virtue and glory. This indicates that Peter himself had been attracted by the virtue and glory of the Lord. Furthermore, he was called to this virtue and glory. Therefore, he is one with the Lord in virtue and in glory.

The apostles proclaimed the virtues of the Lord. They preached them, they taught them, and they announced them. Whatever the apostles preached and taught was a telling out of the virtues they had seen and enjoyed. It was a proclaiming abroad of the virtues in which they had participated. This is what it means to tell out God's excellencies. Today we need to follow the apostles to tell out the excellent virtues of the Lord.

CALLED OUT OF DARKNESS

According to verse 9, we should proclaim abroad the virtues of the One who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. Darkness is the expression and sphere of Satan in death. Light is the expression and sphere of God in life. God has called us, delivered us, out of Satan's death-realm of darkness into His life-realm of light (Acts 26:18; Col. 1:13).